

My Future Multi-booting System

Whether you remember it or not, I've mentioned in previous editor columns that I thought open-source projects such as AROS represent the best hope for a stable, non-stagnating Amiga (-ish) platform (and community). Perhaps in a move to support that end, though most likely not, Dad and I bought a new laptop computer for Christmas, a Lenovo system of many designation numbers. I guess you could call it the family laptop, though I'm the only one who's done anything with it as of this writing.

My eventual plans are to create a multi-booting system, with Linux for some standard work and Internet stuff, Amiga thru X-Amiga or another emulation method, and the aforementioned AROS. It's probably needless to say, but those are plans that are not accomplished easily or quickly. The first thing that was accomplished was the Windows XP that came installed on the system was backed up to DVDs (if I actually did it right) and then excised. I consider it a special irony that, of all the stickers and labels affixed to the underside of the laptop, the Microsoft Windows license sticker is the only one that already looks worn and faded.

The next accomplishment was to get Linux running on the freshly re-partitioned laptop hard drive. I tried a few distros and options, and learned a little about why some

people are enamored with Linux, while others hate it with a passion. First off, I don't envy the producers, programmers, and testers of any operating system which is meant to run on the wide mishmashed variety of hardware from all sorts of manufacturers, slapped together into groupings under the label of the "PC." Some of the various software items I've been trying to install had issues trying to properly recognize MY configuration of hardware, video or sound chips. The most obvious problem is that some items

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didn't properly recognize the SATA hard drive interface in the laptop. One can boot from the CD, but if the hard drive can't be found, there's no way to install anything. With time, effort, and experimentation, I have managed to get one Linux distro running reasonably well. That is "Fire Hydrant," a variant distro of "Puppy" Linux, itself a fairly light and fast Linux form.

Some say that Linux is useless to anyone but programmers and propeller-heads, others say that it

has become the equal to Mac and Windows in terms of functionality and ease-of use. Not surprisingly, both these statements are wrong, but not totally so. I can see some of what the Linux-heads see in it though. Its pretty much possible to get the system to behave almost any way you want, though you'll probably have to do a ton of poking around, tweaking, and trial-and-error to actually get it done. After my own amount of trial-and-error, I've managed to get the Puppy Linux setup to recognize the major hardware components, get sound working properly, and even tie the volume controls to those little multimedia buttons. I even have an Amiga OS4-inspired skin for the window manager, so there's a little more familiarity for getting around. There's still more left to do. I'd like to set it up to take better advantage of the graphic hardware, so playing videos and the like isn't so much of a drain on the CPU, but I'm fairly pleased with what I've managed to do so far, considering I've had next to nothing in the way of Linux experience in the past.

As I delve into the world of Linux, and all that's supposed to make it "easier," I've come to the conclusion that Microsoft's Windows is both the best and the worst thing to happen to Linux, not to mention the computer market in general. Windows is the 800 pound, 800 billion dollar gorilla, impossible to ignore. While their utter, total dominance over the market has been dialed back over the last decade or so, they dominate the market utterly and totally. It's the thing "everyone

uses,” whether they like it or not. This has riled a lot of people up, with the intent to do something better, or at least different. This seems to be part of the spirit behind Linux and other “alternative” operating systems, and keep up the competition from Apple, Amiga, and others (though I can’t say Windows started them, since they were already doing their thing back when Windows was DOS.) This is the “best” influence, the presence of the heavy for the underdogs to fight against and maybe even eventually beat. The “worst” influence comes in because “everyone” is used to using Windows, thus it becomes the benchmark by which other systems are judged for look, feel, and function. One only needs to look as far as the wide variety of “window managers” seen in Linux distributions. There are differences and varying levels of customization, but it’s pretty obvious

the majority are based on the controls of Windows 95 and beyond.

By contrast, I’m more used to the way Amigas and Macs work, and I was rather annoyed by the Windows-esque usage of a closing button in the right-hand corner rather than the left as God intended. Luckily, a little learning and a WM skin called “Miggy4” solved the issue, giving me my window frame buttons in the proper place, as well as a more Amiga-like look. There’s still that pesky clone of the Windows “Start” bar at the bottom though. Heck, even Amiga programmers wrote up a bunch of Start-bar clones after Microsoft came up with that little item. Even Apple has been known to copy Windows features on the extra-rare occasion that they put out something first (It’s only fair, since Windows has ripped

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P.O. Box 813

Bedford, Texas 76095

<http://www.amigamccc.org>

March Calendar

March 12 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter

7:00 pm — **South Grand Prairie Public Library**

760 Bardin Road, Grand Prairie

**Note: Wednesday meeting at
South GP Library**

March 12— MCCC Board of Director's Meeting

Approx. 9:15 pm — Location TBD

March 29 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 am

off Mac and Amiga features and ideas on a regular basis.) Still, it’s a testament to the power Windows has that nearly everyone else wants to be more like them, to be more appealing to the customers (except the ones who are already more used to the way their Amigas or Macs or whatever work instead). Still, sometimes I get the feeling that while I’m fighting one operating system, I’m fighting the one it’s trying to emulate as well.

by Eric Schwartz

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